STREET SPIRIT

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JUSTICE NEWS & HOMELESS BLUES IN THE BAY AREA

UC Berkeley Graduate Discovers the University of the Streets

Even though I was fortunate to have received a great education at UC Berkeley, the education I received on the streets as a homeless man shortly after graduating was even more enlightening.

by Zachary Bowin

This fall 38,000 students will head to the UC Berkeley campus to pursue an undergraduate or graduate education. While UC Berkeley prides itself on its diverse population of students who bring to campus their own unique stories, cultures, values and experiences, the university also emphasizes the commonalities that unite all of its students.

Campus staff, faculty and student orientation counselors repeat ad nauseam that students are special — the chosen few who are getting a world-class public education that will open the doors to opportunity and success. Furthermore, this view is engrained in on-campus culture where discussion focuses around internships, graduate schools and potential employers.

An unhealthy competition exists where the goal is not to get a good job, but the best job. I know this because I experienced it as an undergraduate. And even now, in my current Masters in Social Welfare program, and while I am a proud Golden Bear who feels fortunate to have received a great education at Cal, the education I received on the streets as a homeless man shortly after graduating was even more enlightening.

I graduated in December 2010 with my Bachelors of Arts from UC Berkeley. One of the uniting factors I have noticed among Cal students is our ambitious drive and the pressure for success we place on ourselves. This manifests itself in an overpacked schedule where there is scarcely a single minute not spent attending class, studying, writing papers, working, completing an internship or doing research with a professor.

Michael Rowland and Zachary Bowin became close friends while living on the street.

Thus, when I graduated, I was cautiously optimistic that I would be able to obtain a job that would allow me to support myself. This assumption was never questioned by any of the career counselors, major advisors, professors, or other campus staff I talked to, despite the fact that the country was in a major economic recession and they were aware of the family turbulence which left me without a safety net.

However, the problems in the U.S. economy and my lack of family and

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Blues for the 99 Percent

The Corporate Attack on America's Roots Music

by Bonni McKeown

"Somebody has been cashing checks and they've been bouncing back on us. And these people, the poor class of Negroes and the poor class of white people, they're getting tired of it. And sooner or later it's going to bring on a disease on this country, a disease that's going to spring from midair and it's going to be bad. It's like a spirit from some dark valley, something that sprung up from the ocean..." — Chester Burnett (Howlin Wolf)

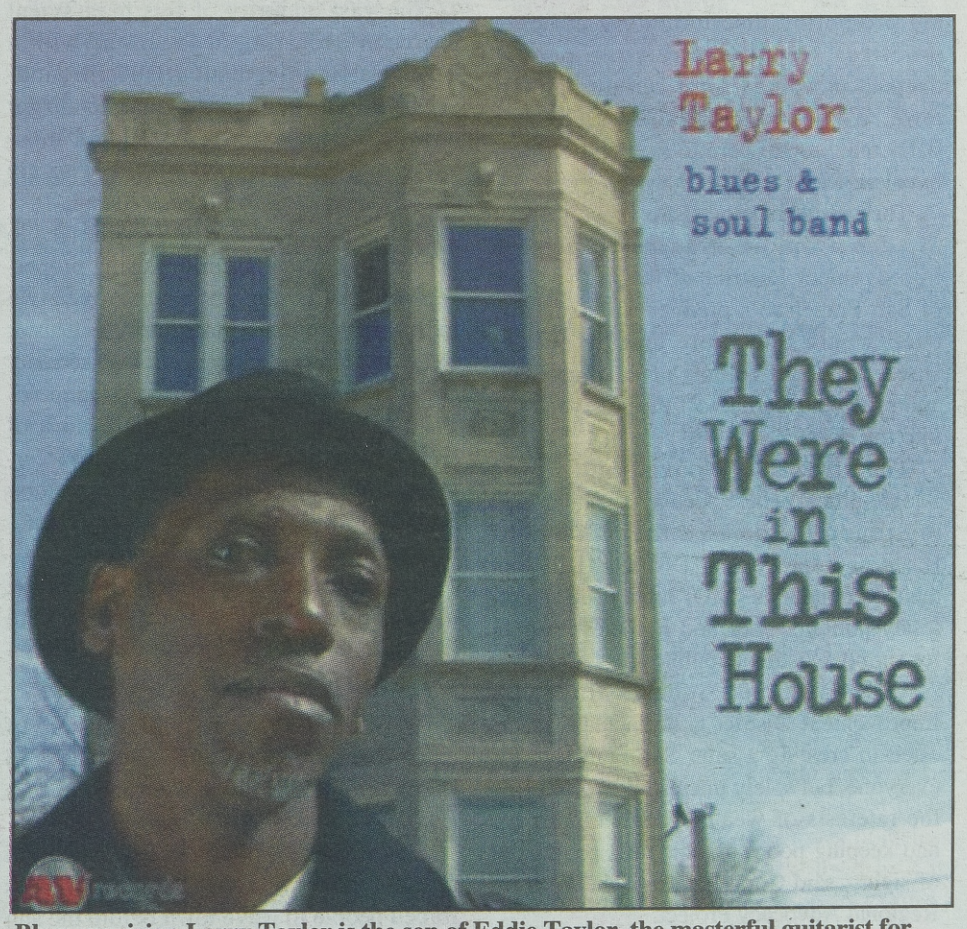
Howlin' Wolf offered that profound insight in an interview at the Ash Grove in Los Angeles in 1968. Wolf was a powerful performer and band leader, and one of the greatest and most passionate blues vocalists of all time. One of the most important founders of the blues, he was perhaps a modern-day prophet as well!

In the cotton fields and levee camps of the early 20th century South, African Americans kept on creating their music. In both churches and juke joints, singing held the community together as Jim Crow oppression threatened to keep people confined in a slavery-like caste system. Songs could convey things too dangerous to speak about — long work hours, low pay, and unfair racist bosses.

Blues helped people survive and occasionally to protest. Muddy Waters, Otis Spann, Little Walter and Willie Dixon traveled to Washington to play at the Poor People's encampment two months after Martin Luther King's death in 1968. As Buddy Guy quoted Muddy in a *Rolling Stone* interview on April 25, 2012: "Blues. The world might wanna forget about 'em, but we can't. We owe 'em our lives."

Renowned jazz trumpeter Wynton Marsalis, on CBS This Morning on April 6, 2012, said after sitting in at an Alabama juke joint: "Blues are good for the soul. Their rhythms are inseparable from the American identity. They encompass the optimism of American identity. And they're not naive. Blues tell us bad things happen all the time, and they do, and we can engage with them."

Marsalis described the friendly, healing atmosphere of America's hard-to-find juke joints: "Humility is the foundation of humanity ... When you reach out to someone, when you're empathetic, that's your humanity, when you're together.... Music brings us together in thought and feeling, and emotion."



Blues musician Larry Taylor is the son of Eddie Taylor, the masterful guitarist for bluesman Jimmy Reed. Today, Larry carries on the living spirit of Chicago blues.

Blues is the opposite of exploitation, subjugation and separation of people by rule of fear. Blues insists we're human, imperfect, yet there's Spirit in us. We can get it together.

We need blues now more than ever. New Jim Crow snuck up on America and legalized racial discrimination via the War on Drugs. New Jim Crow has shot the Bill of Rights full of holes and put millions in

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Business Improvement Districts and 'Broken Windows' Laws

The broken windows theory of policing conceptualizes poor people as things to be removed and not people who are struggling to survive.

by Jesse Clarke and the Western Regional Advocacy Project

On July 31, members of the Western Regional Advocacy Project (WRAP) organized a march to the Union Square Business Improvement District in San Francisco to protest the way businesses and local officials use a combination of private security forces and city police to harass and banish homeless people.

Advocates from three states converged on the Union Square Business Improvement District as part of a national campaign to build a multi-state Homeless Bill of Rights and demand the right for all people to engage in the necessary activities of sitting, lying, eating, and sharing food without being criminalized.

The march was another essential step in building a movement towards the elimination of poverty and homelessness and advancing the fight for the Right to Rest.

The Western Regional Advocacy Project is coordinating this fight against the criminalization of poor and homeless people's existence in Colorado, Oregon and California. All three states are considering legislation for a Right To Rest. California's legislation was authored by Senator Carol Liu, SB 608.

The march kicked off with a boisterous rally at Powell Street BART Station at the cable car turnaround, a San Francisco tourist destination. Weaving through the Friday afternoon commuters, shoppers and tourists, more than 75 protesters waved colorful placards demanding "House Keys Not Handcuffs."

Protesters condemn the harassment of poor people by security forces of the Union Square Business Improvement District in San Francisco. The sign says: *"A right delayed is a right denied." — Dr. Martin Luther King.* Janny Castillo photo

On July 31, housing activists marched on the office of the Union Square Business Improvement District. Janny Castillo photo

DISCRIMINATORY POLICING

"We are back to the days of Jim Crow laws and Anti-Okie laws," said Lisa Marie Alatorre of the San Francisco Coalition on Homelessness. "The BIDs are promoting discriminatory policing practices to simply remove people deemed unwanted from certain parts of town. We are marching today to tell the BIDs that we are here to stay and we will have our Right to Rest."

The marchers moved up Powell Street to the Union Square Business Improvement District office in the heart of San Francisco's premier shopping district, where they were met by police. Huge cardboard cutouts of jails appeared and protesters spilled off the sidewalk and into the street.

The crowd then moved into Union Square proper where speakers from around the country addressed the problem of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) in their communities. BIDs have been relentlessly policing poor and homeless people for simply existing in public space.

"The Union Square Business Improvement District is not actually interested in creating a safer San Francisco for everyone, but solely interested in protecting the interests of wealthy San Franciscans and keeping poor and homeless people out of sight," said Coral Feigin of the Western Regional Advocacy Project.

A recent street outreach survey conducted by organizers at WRAP shows that 79 percent of people on the streets who received a ticket from the police assumed that it was a result of their economic status. Also, 74 percent of street-involved people have seen private security guards harassing, policing and displacing people from the public sidewalk.

At the same time, only 28 percent of people surveyed in San Francisco know of a safe and legal place to sleep.

The vast majority of this harassment has been occurring at locations within Business Improvement District boundaries. Enforcing laws meant to target homeless people simply is adding more stress and struggle into people who are already struggling to even survive.

The Union Square BID, which gets 96 percent of its funding from raising property taxes in the district, spends over two million dollars on what it calls "Clean & Safe" expenses such as policing, security cameras and other surveillance technology. The main focus of the BID's idea of safety involves citing, harassing, incarcerating and displacing poor and homeless people through the discriminatory practices of enforced sit/lie legislation.

As the demonstration came to a close, protesters called for a return to San Francisco to protest BIDs in the near future.

LAWS THAT BANISH AND EXCLUDE

The United States has a long history of using discriminatory and violent laws to keep "certain" people out of public spaces and out of public consciousness.

Jim Crow laws segregated the South after the Civil War and Sundown Towns forced people to leave town before the sun set. The anti-Okie law of the 1930s in California forbade poor Dustbowl immigrants from entering the state. Ugly Laws swept the country and criminalized people with disabilities for being seen in public.

Today, such laws mostly target homeless people and are commonly called "quality of life" laws or "nuisance crimes." They criminalize sleeping, standing, sitting, and even food-sharing. Just like the laws from our past, they deny people their right to exist in local communities.

Today's "quality of life" laws and ordinances have their roots in the broken-windows theory. This theory holds that one poor person in a neighborhood is like a first unrepaired broken window. If the "window" is not immediately fixed or removed, it is a signal that no one cares, that disorder will flourish, and the community will unravel. This theory conceptualizes poor people as "things" to be removed, and not people who are struggling to survive.

BIDS AND POLITICAL REPRESSION

Nowadays, we have Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) collaborating with police enforcement to keep business neighborhoods flourishing by removing poor people from visible spaces.

BIDs are made up of a group of property and business owners deciding to assess or tax themselves in order to invest in a more "safe and attractive" consumer environment. There are well over 1,000 of these special districts throughout the United States and Canada. Their main function is to drive homeless people away from the BID by hassling them, enforcing the sit-lie law and other discriminatory tactics, and by notifying law enforcement when quality of life offenses are being committed, thus criminalizing homeless and poor people's existence.

We are right back to Jim Crow Laws, Sundown Towns, Ugly Laws and Anti-Okie Laws. We have gone from the days where people could be told "you can't sit at this lunch counter" to being told "you can't sit on this sidewalk," from "you're on the wrong side of the tracks" to "it is illegal to hang out" on this street or corner.

We will only win this struggle for social justice if we use our collective strengths, organizing, outreach, research, public education, artwork, and direct actions. WRAP and our allies are continuing to expand our network of organizations and cities and we will ultimately bring down the whole oppressive system of policing poverty and treating poor people as "broken windows" needing to be discarded and replaced. Our liberation is dependent on your liberation.

Street Spirit

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Freedom Sleepers Demand Repeal of Camping Ban

by Steve Pleich

In response to recent drastic cuts in homeless services, a group of grassroots activists and concerned citizens have come together in Santa Cruz to petition the local government to repeal the Camping Ban and create safe sleeping places for unsheltered persons.

The group has organized a series of actions, including Community Camp Outs at the City Hall, to protest the increasing criminalization of homeless people.

Freedom Sleepers is a coalition of groups, including Santa Cruz Food Not Bombs, HUFF (Homeless United for Friendship and Freedom), Homeless Persons Legal Assistance Project and the Camp of Last Resort.

Freedom Sleeper and HUFF co-founder Robert Norse puts the goal of the group in perspective. "The right to sleep is the right to live," Norse said. "This is a cry of conscience. If enough people hear it and join us, things will change."

Freedom Sleepers takes its name from the Freedom Riders of the 1960s. Founding member Rabbi Phil Posner decries the sleeping ban and the lack of safe sleeping spaces in the city.

"Santa Cruz has 116 acres of parks, including two reserved for dogs to play," Posner said. "Having to sleep on a sidewalk is both uncomfortable and unhealthy. Surely we can spare a few acres where people may safely sleep, without fear of breaking the law!

"As a 1961 Freedom Rider, I served 39 days in the Mississippi penitentiary fighting discrimination. I and others will continue to resist discriminatory local ordinances which forbid individuals a place and opportunity to sleep. We call upon our City Council to find a way to alleviate homeless suffering."

Freedom Sleepers held their third group campout at Santa Cruz City Hall on July 26. Several dozen people slept in the City Hall courtyard from sunset until the following morning. The July 26 sleep-in was preceded by campouts on July 4 and July 19, which were organized after the Homeless Services Center announced in June it was having severe budget issues and would be losing a significant amount of state-administered federal funding.

In response to the imminent loss of a wide variety of day services, a coalition of homeless rights groups, including Santa Cruz Food Not Bombs, joined together to host a series of free breakfasts next to the center. The City Hall campouts are the next step in that response and are now focused on the broader issues surrounding the criminalization of homelessness.

Says Santa Cruz Food Not Bombs co-founder Abbi Samuels, "Being a part of the Freedom Sleepers actions is where we need to be as an organization that works for social justice. We will continue this fight until justice is done and people can safely and legally sleep."

The coordinated actions have drawn some response from City Hall. Santa Cruz City Councilmember Micah Posner says that he is willing to place the repeal of the camping ban before the council for a full public hearing.

"My intention," he said, "is to place the issue on the City Council's agenda this fall by asking the council to either repeal the anti-sleeping ordinances or begin a process to identify a place in the city for homeless people to sleep. If you don't want to locate a place for them in the city, what makes you think that they will disappear? If you do support a legal place, what would it be like?"

Freedom Sleepers is asking the entire community to join them in these ongoing actions, but is mindful that participation at the community campouts is an act of civil disobedience because it involves the violation of multiple local ordinances.

One such ordinance closes the courtyard at City Hall to the public between the hours of 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. Another is the primary focus of these actions: the city's camping ban, which prohibits sleeping in public with or without bedding between the hours of 11 p.m. and 8:30 a.m.

But even with this admonition, Freedom Sleepers believe the issue is important enough to put themselves in harm's way. Says longtime homeless advocate and attorney Ed Frey, "Sleep is not just a constitutional right, it is a basic human right whose denial is the very definition of cruel and unusual punishment."

Freedom Sleepers will continue the Community Campouts at City Hall when the City Council goes back into session after a July hiatus. The first action is scheduled for Tuesday, August 11.

Steve Pleich is a Freedom Sleeper and an advocate with the Santa Cruz Homeless Persons Advocacy Project.

The Freedom Sleepers held three sleep-ins at Santa Cruz City Hall in July to challenge the laws that criminalize homelessness.

"As a 1961 Freedom Rider, I served 39 days in the Mississippi penitentiary fighting discrimination. I and others will continue to resist discriminatory local ordinances which forbid individuals a place and opportunity to sleep. We call upon our City Council to find a way to alleviate homeless suffering." — Rabbi Phil Posner, founding member of the Freedom Sleepers

The Brave New World of Centralized Intake in Berkeley

One can't help but notice that all this wrangling over intake forms, coordination, and "centralized intake" hasn't managed to produce any additional low-income housing or shelter beds.

by Carol Denney

About a year ago, a jumble of initials began to drift into conversation about Berkeley's crisis in low-income housing and homelessness.

Nobody seemed entirely clear on what "HCRC" stood for. After scouring the town for answers, one thing is clear: Nobody is entirely clear on what "HCRC" ultimately will mean for Berkeley.

The initials are easy: "HCRC" stands for Housing Crisis Resolution Center, described as a "coordinated access system ... a streamlined way for homeless people to access shelter, transitional and permanent housing and services," according to the City of Berkeley's website.

"Coordinated" always sounds nifty. "Streamlined" is even better. "Streamlined" is the phrase that pops up in planning circles when they want to reduce the bumps in the road for developers who get bruised if they're obligated to interact too much with the neighborhoods near a proposed project or mingle too often with interested commissions or community groups.

This centralized intake plan is a new Housing and Urban Development requirement for getting government money for "homeless services" dollars, and the City of Berkeley wants to make sure it can qualify. But what exactly it will become is anybody's guess right now.

The implication in the lofty wording of announcements about the project seem to imply more housing, but Berkeley's last low-income housing expenditures were about 15 years ago, and involved rehabbing existing low-income housing at UA Homes and Erna P. Harris Court.

But the concept of one-stop services remains compelling in a town where trying to obtain food, shelter, and a place to store belongings can mean endlessly hiking hither and yon. If a single intake system enables people in need to be served better, and coordinated agencies can operate better, who could possibly object?

Especially since, according to the City of Berkeley, "by submitting this application, your Agency is agreeing to accept referrals for City of Berkeley funded services/housing exclusively from the HCRC." And any agency coordinating with the HCRC must agree that all "intakes" will be done by HCRC staff. Raising too much fuss about the system *might affect your funding*.

Still, one can't help but notice after decades of living in Berkeley, that all this wrangling over intake forms, coordination, and definitions hasn't managed to produce any additional low-income housing or shelter beds.

Our nationwide housing crisis keeps roaring at a faster and faster pace, almost as fast as developers whip out their wallets and feed the status quo. The Bay Area's scarce housing "opportunity sites," once identified to a planning department, tend to become high-end condos for the wealthy. The pressure to kick out long-term and fixed-income tenants is like a powerful firehose, while the parade of high-end housing projects seems impervious to the urgency of the low-income housing crisis.

What we know for sure is the Housing Crisis Resolution Center will be in charge of all intakes and assessments regarding who needs what services, and who "qualifies" for help. It will produce interesting data and require all related agencies to do the same. This kind of data may be useful in measuring and sizing up things in quantifiable ways, which is always powerful in funding services and programs. If you ask the right questions, and get honest answers, you can learn things, qualify for grants, guide programs, and apply funding where funding is most needed.

But the right questions, the honest answers, the best ways to get at the truth are a tricky, sticky wicket. Note the Downtown Berkeley Association's enthusiastic abuse of a 2015 poll in which the highest of the Berkeley public's priorities was homelessness. The poll was swiftly used by City Councilmember Linda Maio to excuse a new raft of anti-homeless laws.

The best people to evaluate a system are the people who experience it. As this project develops, it makes sense to try to make sure the people it affects most have a voice in how it works, a powerful voice so that it someday has the ability to work even better in addressing human needs with the valuable guidance of people who experience it firsthand as clients.

Selling Street Spirit Changed His Outlook on Life

by Lydia Gans

When a friendly person selling *Street Spirit* outside the Berkeley Bowl asked me to autograph an article I had written in the paper, I knew I had to write about this man. Ralph Perry has been selling *Street Spirit* at the Berkeley Bowl on and off for the last 12 years. He is 64 years old.

Watching him offer the paper to the shoppers as they come by the Berkeley Bowl, I can see he likes what he's doing. He talks about the different reactions he gets from people passing by. Sometimes they'll say something about the paper. Yet occasionally they can be hostile.

"But every day is a blessing," Perry says. "God is good. And He brings me closer to more good people."

Unlike many sellers who never bother, Perry tells me he actually reads the paper. "You find out when you read it that it's very interesting," he said. "I live in the street, I don't have TV or radio. Gives me something to do at night. I walk a lot and I read the paper. I pray."

He gave up the apartment he and his wife were living in when she had a stroke last December. It is a way to save money, but he still has to cover the cost of storing their belongings. His wife is in rehab now and he expects soon to be looking for an apartment. It might not be easy to find an affordable place nearby. And she will probably need help when she comes home.

They knew each other back when they were both students at Berkeley High, and they have been married for 12 years, going on 13.

Ralph grew up in Berkeley. "My childhood was good," he tells me. "I have loving parents, loving brothers and sisters, 11 of us, so I never was lonely. I love my family, we love each other, we're close-knitted."

Ralph Perry's life changed for the better as a *Street Spirit* vendor. Lydia Gans photo

Yet, even in his early years, his life seemed to go in the wrong direction. He describes a continuous round of petty crimes, jail time, and periods of legitimate work. He started when he was 11 years old.

"Me and my brother found a stash of drugs, which were called crystals then, and we decided to learn how to shoot drugs," Perry says. "That's when I started."

He tells of petty thefts and serving time in Santa Rita jail, and then getting married and working at Bay Meadows Race Track. At that point, he explains, "I ran with the wrong crowd again."

The marriage didn't last. He went back to dealing drugs, and spent a term in San Quentin. That was the pattern of his life up until 10 years ago. Seemingly, he could always find trouble when he was young.

"It was fun," he says, recalling how he made a fool of himself when he was 16. While trying to rob a Winchell's, he actually ran straight into the door trying to get out. Another time, he stole a package of hamburger meat from Safeway and got caught as soon as he rounded the corner.

But somewhere along the way, it stopped being fun. The acts and the consequences got more serious. He talked about being robbed, being shot at, about lucky escapes and being imprisoned.

Ultimately, Perry had to change. "I waited till 53 to grow up," he admits.

I asked what made him finally stop. "I got tired. It was no longer fun — drugs, the people I'm with, any of it. I don't need it. I just gave up. I'm tired."

A cousin suggested he sell *Street Spirit* "to keep me out of trouble," he says. It took a while, but it changed him.

"It was something new," he says. "I had to interact with different people and I've always been kind of a withdrawn person. I stay by myself. I'm really not a talkative person. (When) I got out here doing this, I learned how to communicate. Here it's about communicating with people. When they see I give my heart to it because I believe in God and God knows that I'm here, they see it."

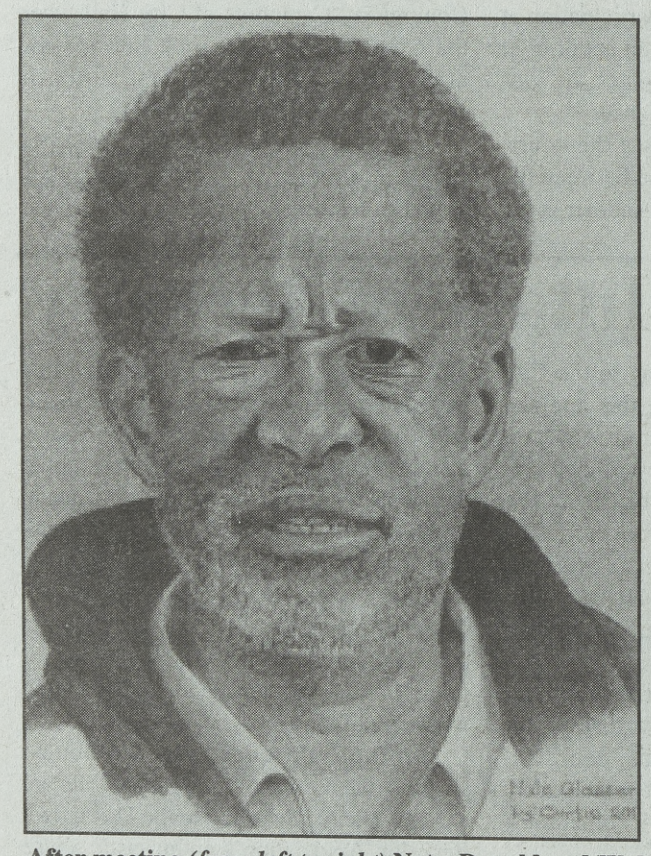
As he talks, he sees that I'm impressed by what he is saying. He assures me that he tells people they should read the paper. "Yes, you're helping me but you're also learning something that we did not know and that's important, to learn something."

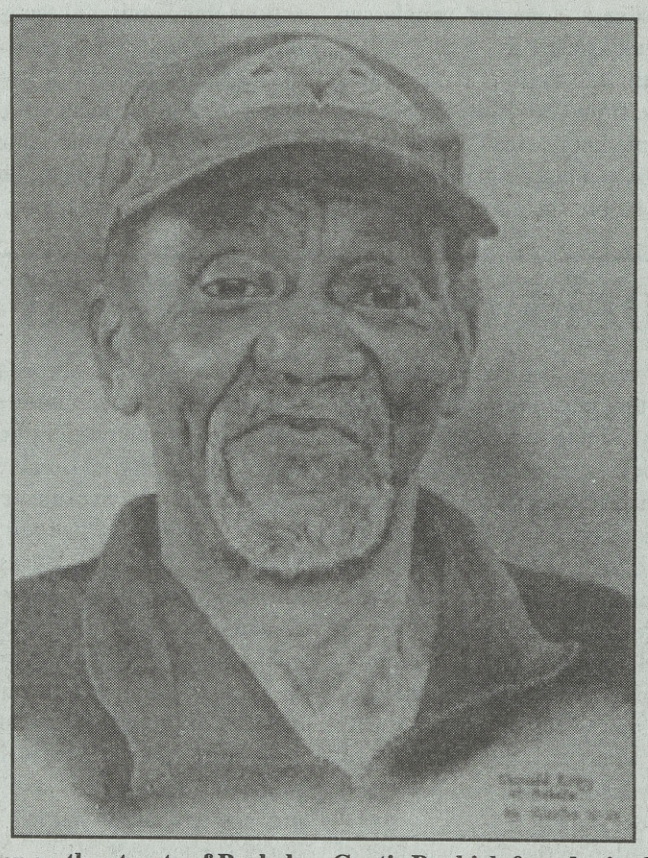
We look at the lead article in the current *Street Spirit* about Ground Zero's campaign of nonviolent resistance to the nuclear arms race, which makes a powerful impression on both of us.

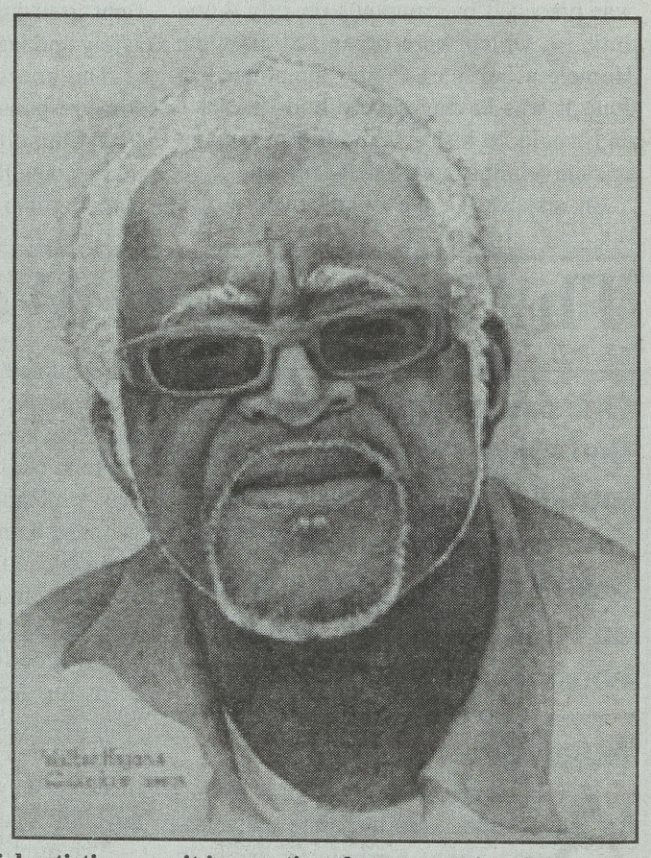
"This has really caught my interest," he says. "I'd like to know a lot more about it. Now I want to investigate."

He is facing some major challenges now. Social Security and government assistance won't go far in providing food and shelter for him and his wife while she is disabled. Getting out to Berkeley Bowl with the *Street Spirit* every day will keep up his spirits and a roof over their heads.

Artistic Portraits Reveal the Human Faces in Our Midst







After meeting *(from left to right)* Nate, Donald and Walter on the streets of Berkeley, Curtis Burbick found a joyful artistic pursuit in creating these portraits of the men.

by Curtis Burbick

"Spare change? Maybe on the way out?" This is a request I often hear voiced on the street scene in Berkeley, and this is what finally led me to begin producing pencil portraits after meeting these casual friends.

Any one of the trio of individuals I have portrayed might be found just outside the door of a coffee shop, asking for a little help. It had been my habit at first to offer a hand to them by responding with a contribution and some small talk.

Now, since I love to draw, it occurred to me that I might try to capture in my sketch book the energy and experiences mapped on their faces, to capture that engaging look they always wore when our paths crossed.

So I asked each one if I could take their photographs and draw their portraits. In an effort to get their agreement to this, I started showing them some other drawings I had done, and also assured them they would receive a copy of their portrait.

I was quickly warming to this new idea so much, that in getting a "yes, OK," from Walter, I began snapping a few shots of him and then began rendering his picture. And when a first draft was completed, I approached Nate, and then finally Donald.

After a few months spent at drawing, I'd finished all three portraits, and realized how new and exciting this venture was. The evolution of it initially began for me with the casual befriending of these three, and included observing their persuasive skills at conjuring funds often on cold mornings from passers-by.

This process culminated with the pleasure and joy of my bringing them to life in drawings on the pages of my sketchbook.

This all was quite unique, seeming to have more joy in it than I'd ever experienced before. I also noted it had taken more time than expected. ("Oh Vincent, I've always envied your facility to produce quick results.")

And so? What were the conclusions and rewards? Well, Walter was delighted and wanted a copy for an old friend. Nate always greets me now with a thankful smile. Donald, the very gentle one, spoke proudly and warmly when pondering the copies I gave him.

Speaking Out Against Police Violence and Racism

These recent deaths of young African American men have received a lot of publicity. Yet hundreds more police-inflicted deaths like these have not been reported by the media.

A Los Angeles protest of the police killings of Ezell Ford and Michael Brown held at the LAPD headquarters on August 17, 2014. A demonstrator records the protest. Videos are now a powerful tool to document police violence. Craig Dietrich photo

Commentary by Jack Bragen

The American Civil War (1861 to 1865) was the bloodiest in U.S. history, and its most crucial issue was the abolition of slavery. Since then, it has been a long, difficult, and sometimes bloody struggle for nonwhite people to receive equal treatment in America. And our country is not there yet.

While the election of Barack Obama to the presidency was initially greeted as a hopeful sign of progress by many, old resentment has flared among white racist people in southern states and elsewhere. Petitions have been circulated in several states advocating for them to secede from the United States — the same historic action that triggered the Civil War.

White police officers across the nation have repeatedly killed innocent African-American men. All too often, they have been getting away with this and are rarely punished by racially biased court systems.

On July 17, 2014, Eric Garner died of a chokehold inflicted by NYPD officers.

Michael Brown was murdered by the police in Ferguson, Missouri, on August 9, 2014, over an alleged theft of cigarillos.

Two days later, on August 11, Ezell Ford, an African American man with a history of mental illness, was brutally killed by Los Angeles police — shot in the back three times after he was physically subdued.

Jason Harrison, whose mother had phoned police to have him taken to the hospital when he was in mental crisis and needed help, was shot to death on June 14, 2014, by Dallas police because he was holding a small screwdriver. The police claimed it was a deadly weapon.

These deaths of four young African American men received a lot of publicity. Yet there have been hundreds more police-inflicted deaths like these that apparently have gone unnoticed because the mass media have not given them coverage.

When these horrible incidents are recorded on people's video equipment, it is a powerful way to refute police officers and others in positions of power who lie about their actions to avoid prosecution. When the beating of Rodney King was recorded with video equipment, it was the beginning of the use of this powerful tool.

We have been told that parents of young African American men must give them a talk when they are growing up — not about "the birds and the bees," but about how to behave when approached by police officers. Black men apparently are automatically presumed guilty by all too many white police officers.

It is ironic that these police murders, and the nationwide protests of these horrific incidents, have occurred while we have a black president. Because the president of the United States does not have unlimited powers, President Obama appears to be helpless to stop the brutality.

It is as though many police officers in our nation have a personal vendetta against black people. The incidents that have been reported are not unique; it is just that people have captured the video on their camera phones. When people see the brutality on television or on the Internet, it becomes a powerful mobilizing force.

President Obama's election became possible in part due to the help of demographic changes in the United States. The reliance of giant corporations on imported labor in order to avoid paying fair wages to employees has backfired on the very same members of the ultra-wealthy elite, and has allowed a higher number of Latino immigrants into the United States, many of whom have ultimately become U.S. citizens, and have voted.

Furthermore, after Al Gore lost to George W. Bush in the 2000 presidential election, the issue of disenfranchisement among African American voters gained more attention. When Bush was put in office, initially via the Supreme Court ruling, millions of conscientious voters were outraged. There were extremely long lines at polling places where African American voters were predominant. There also may have been miscounting in Florida, where Jeb Bush was governor.

By the time Obama ran in the 2008 election, the issue of voter disenfranchisement may have been at least partially resolved because of the public attention it received.

Obama's election may be one reason among many why a minority of bigoted white people, among them police, have once again directed their violence and dishonesty at African American citizens.

As a Caucasian mentally ill man, I have felt a billy club smacking my head, I have felt handcuffs on my wrists, and I have been incarcerated under the incorrect presumption that my behavior was due to being "on drugs."

I haven't always been treated well by police, but I haven't so far been shot to death. The fact that I haven't been summarily shot to death could partly be due to not being African American. Yet, it is very clear to me that the U.S. needs some kind of constitutional amendment that will make cops more accountable and less brutal.

It appears that the African-American community will not rest until there is justice, in which police will no longer be immune to legal retribution when they slaughter innocent people. The white racists are outnumbered and are not happy about this.

The horrible massacre of nine people in an historic civil rights church, the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, on June 17, 2015, is yet another outburst of racist violence directed against African Americans. Dylann Roof, a young white man, has admitted committing these murders as an act of white racism. It is crucial for all people of conscience to demand an end to the scourge of racism, racially motivated murders, and police brutality.

The United States could either go in the direction of a police state, or the pendulum could swing the other way, and we could see a new era of everyone truly receiving equal protection under the law.

All Shook Up: How Human Beings Are Turned into Categories

When many diverse individuals are lumped into a single category, the result is unfair and terribly misleading.

by Carol Denney

Trying to talk to people about anti-homeless laws is like entering a hall of mirrors.

Whether you're trying to talk about the original laws proposed by Berkeley Councilmember Linda Maio and the Downtown Berkeley Association (DBA), and provisionally passed by the City Council on March 17, 2015, or Maio's middle-of-the-night amendments on June 30, 2015, or the growing mountain of laws targeting "problematic street behavior" in cities nationwide, the discussion tends to indiscriminately group very different individuals into a single category.

Rowdy high school kids, drunks, junkies, recently evicted families, homeless women, people recently released from jail, panhandlers, youth, the LGBT population, people with dogs, people too poor to afford the Bay Area's skyrocketing rents, people who threaten others, people who urinate in public, people with mental illness, people traveling through town for a concert or job prospect, and people with a lot of belongings to shepherd through town with no legal place to go, all get discussed as though they are *all the same*.

It's dizzying. The composite picture in the minds of people who promote anti-homeless laws is a predictable nightmare. It's as though all the groups in the preceding paragraph were put in a bag, shaken together and merged into one, and the ensuing discussions, even honest efforts to find common ground, get shipwrecked because nobody is having the same discussion.

Bathrooms are a great example. The DBA, with no particular objection from the City Council, is well on its way to succeeding in avoiding having a public bathroom in the BART Plaza redesign despite its being the best, most logical place for a public bathroom in the downtown area.

The DBA scrambles to look pro-bathroom in public by promoting BART's opening its bathrooms (closed as a security risk after 9-11), and promoting the idea that city garages and other out-of-the-way places could take up some of the slack.

But in private documents, they call bathrooms "an attractive nuisance" and recommend against them despite the obvious irony of DBA CEO's John Caner's very public and very indignant complaints about the inevitable result.

Let's have the same discussion about the same issues. Many of the issues we'd like to solve as a community are easy to solve. And perhaps the easiest, in theory, is housing our working class and poor.

If all development going forward were dedicated to addressing our crisis in low-income housing instead of being a parlor game played by politicians on behalf of wealthy developers who are generous around campaign time, we would have a healthy head start.

We could have housed all of our poor and homeless residents — a relatively small number — long ago. *Let's get started.*

House Keys Not Handcuffs

Homeless Organizing, Art and Politics

Police use laws against trespassing, panhandling, loitering, vagrancy and disorderly conduct to punish poor people and exacerbate their misery and desperation. They also confiscate their meager possessions, bringing additional despair.

Paul Boden, the director of WRAP, is the author of *House Keys Not Handcuffs*.

At the State Capitol, activists carry "House Keys Not Handcuffs" posters to protest the steep rise in anti-homeless laws in California. Photo credit: Janny Castillo

Book Review by Paul Von Blum

House Keys Not Handcuffs, by Paul Boden, a dramatic and disconcerting book on homeless organizing, art and policy in San Francisco and elsewhere, begins with this personal quotation that puts homelessness in the compelling human perspective it demands: "Holy shit, it is time to go home and I got nowhere to go."

Millions of women, men and children live precarious lives on American streets and shelters, tragically beyond the concern, empathy and often even awareness of the overwhelming majority of their more privileged fellow citizens. The plight of the homeless, for political "leaders," is mostly a mere annoyance. They are an irritant to public officials and a fruitful source of arrest statistics for police departments throughout the nation.

Far too many Americans avoid contact with homeless people, whom they regard as distasteful and inconvenient — unpleasant reminders of the huge gap in wealth and privilege in this country. Conservatives (and many others) like to tell themselves that homeless people are there by choice, simply because of their unwillingness to work hard, defer gratification and live according to society's rules and standards.

By emphasizing house keys instead of *handcuffs in the title, Boden deliberately* asks his readers to understand that the homeless need homes and serious social and public health services, not arrests, prosecution, police harassment and the continuing criminalization of the poor in America. This is a central theme of this powerful volume.

It calls justifiable and powerful attention to the long record of using laws against trespassing, panhandling, loitering, vagrancy, disorderly conduct and many other variants to punish poor people and exacerbate their misery and desperation. Drug and alcohol laws are also tools in the seemingly limitless arsenal of law enforcement authorities.

Police officials likewise use injunctions and "orders to vacate" and regularly confiscate the meager possessions of the homeless, bringing additional despair to these marginalized human beings. With unaffordable fines and excessive bails, homeless people often spend time in local jails, adding criminal records to the already complex burdens of their lives. This makes it even more difficult for them to find employment and to obtain the medical and psychological services they require.

This criminalization reflects the national mania for "broken windows" policing, which ostensibly focuses on small crimes like vandalism, public drinking and loitering in order to prevent more serious crimes. This is a transparent rationalization for social policies that reinforce racism, classism and economic injustice, including the appalling numbers of homeless people in America.

Broken windows policing has led to such injustices as "stop and frisk" laws and other policies that disproportionately target people of color. At its worst, broken windows policing leads to the deaths of unarmed people. One of the most egregious examples occurred in 2014 when New York Police Department officers in Staten Island killed an African-American man with a chokehold after seeking to arrest him for allegedly selling loose cigarettes.

The book also provides a deeper understanding of the homelessness crisis in the Bay Area and, by extension, throughout the country. It provides a detailed narrative of the organizing and political activities of 30 years of homeless organizing in San Francisco. It offers an outstanding guide for contemporary activists about what has worked and what has not. It also discusses the Western Regional Advocacy Project (WRAP), which was created to expose and eliminate the root causes of poverty and homelessness in that region.

In its decade of existence, WRAP has served as a model of community organizing that goes far beyond the single issue of not having houses for people experiencing massive poverty. Its broad-based focus on social justice addresses child abuse and domestic violence, downsizing and layoffs, racism, unlawful evictions and other illegal actions, government budget cuts, inadequate or nonexistent mental health treatment and many related issues.

WRAP has several constituent member groups, and its efforts go beyond the Bay Area. This form of coalition building is a useful guide for other activists seeking to change society at the grass-roots level, especially in a nation that has experienced the greatest degree of inequality of wealth and income in almost a century.

One striking feature of *House Keys Not Handcuffs* is the story of *Street Sheet,* told through a series of its articles from 1991 to 2014. *Street Sheet* is published by the Coalition on Homelessness and sold in San Francisco. It contains articles about the problems of the homeless population and is the oldest street newspaper in the United States.

Vendors distribute the newspaper on the streets of San Francisco, selling it for $1. The homeless and low-income vendors pay nothing for the papers and keep all the money they receive. These vendors are, in fact, men and women who are actually working; they might otherwise be holding cups and begging for spare change, perhaps with signs reading "Will Work for Food" or "Have a Blessed Day."

Each month, *Street Sheet* reaches 32,000 readers and provides a voice for the voiceless. The paper encourages them to write about life, politics and anything else from their perspective. That vision is a conspicuous and dramatic contrast to the mainstream media in America.

The most engaging element of this book is its inclusion of 67 powerful pieces of art, making this volume a striking collection of contemporary, socially conscious art. These works are introduced in an essay by Art Hazelwood, "We Won't Be Made Invisible: Art of Homeless Activism."

Hazelwood is a veteran artist/activist whose works have made a major contribution to the recent history of political art, especially in California. He has been responsible for making *Street Sheet* a newspaper where art by and about homeless people has been published and become available to large audiences. His personal artwork has graced the pages of *Street Sheet* for many years. Several of Hazelwood's pieces appear in *House Keys Not Handcuffs*, allowing readers a splendid sample of his work addressing homelessness, poverty and related themes.

As a curator, Hazelwood has assembled several exhibitions that reflected his exemplary commitment to using art in the long struggle for social change. "Hobos to Street People: Artists' Responses to Homelessness From the New Deal to the Present," which ran from 2009 to 2012, is most closely linked to the themes in the current book. That exhibition, which was shown in various California venues, featured both iconic artists from the Depression era and contemporary artists dealing with the seemingly endless struggle against poverty.

In *House Keys, Not Handcuffs,* Hazelwood has gathered a stunning group of contributing artists, including some major figures in contemporary political art. Readers and viewers who follow visual arts will recognize names such as Eric Drooker, Jos Sances, Doug Minkler, Christine Hanlon, Hazelwood himself and others. Notably, several unidentified visual artists also appear in this book, as well as works from the San Francisco Print Collective and other sources.

Above all, the book's inclusion of these provocative artworks reveals once again that the arts are an integral feature of the long struggle for social justice, not a mere cultural adjunct to organizing and concerted political action. Throughout history, visual artists have mobilized their talents to support movements for social change.

In the United States, visual artists have played prominent roles in the civil rights movement, and, more recently, many have been extremely active in demonstrations supporting "Black Lives Matter" actions. Painters, muralists, poster artists, printmakers, photographers and others have also been deeply involved in the Chicano, Asian-American, Native American and other ethnic struggles, the gay and lesbian movement, the environmental movement, various anti-war resistance activities and every other progressive movement.

Eric Drooker's 2008 drawing for *Street Sheet*, reprinted in the book, is an excellent and unnerving example of the link between visual arts and the broader struggle for social justice. The artist's image of a menacing police officer standing in front of a building representing City Hall, with a club swinging in his hand, signifies the dubious policy of governmental repression against the homeless. The *Street Sheet* headline, "Police Kill Man Panhandling, No Crimes Charged," hanging over the drawing underscores the continued violence against America's most vulnerable population. Underneath Drooker's work, the article about cruel and unusual budget cuts underscores official indifference, offering *Street Sheet's* readers a partisan yet accurate view of official policy regarding homelessness in San Francisco.

House Keys Not Handcuffs is a persuasive reminder of the tremendous work that remains to be done to close the gap between American ideals and American realities. Paul Boden ruefully notes at the book's conclusion that the government never stopped investing in housing; it merely stopped investing in housing for the poor. Boden and fellow homeless advocates know that there is a desperate need for federal funding for affordable housing.

Beyond that, more fundamental systemic change is required to end homelessness and provide the educational, employment, health care and other services that a decent and humane society should guarantee to everyone. This book represents a small but valuable step in generating that consciousness.

DBA Ambassadors Sweep People Away 'Like Trash'

Open Letter to the Berkeley Peace and Justice Commission

Peace and Justice Commission
Eric Brenman, Secretary
2180 Milvia Street, 2nd Floor
Berkeley CA 94704

& Secretary Andrew Wicker,
Commission on Homeless

Dear Commissioners,

Yesterday, July 1st, 2015, at around 10:30 a.m., I witnessed a Block by Block "ambassador" sweeping directly around and within inches of a man who was curled up under a blanket near the curb on Shattuck Avenue at Kittredge.

I had witnessed this strange sweeping harassment technique by the Block by Block employees personally twice before and had hoped that the commission's focus on the Block by Block program employees' abuses might have curbed it, but clearly this people-sweeping "beautification" technique continues to be used to harass people with lots of belongings with them and/or people who are trying to get some rest.

There was plenty to clean elsewhere in the area, but the employee continued to sweep directly around the body and belongings of the man with the blanket and his friend, who stood quietly watching in amazement as did I.

He and his friend were told they had to move, and they did move, quickly gathering their belongings.

By the time I got my camera out, she moved her broom and dustpan down into the gutter and began sweeping there, which is not quite as offensive, but she definitely was being instructed by Lance Goree, who was nearby watching carefully while pretending to clean a phone booth. He seemed to be speaking into some kind of microphone. He turned his back and walked away from me when I tried to take his picture, but circled back to watch again as the men picked up their things and left.

I hope your Commission will renew its request to have Block by Block employees refrain from this kind of "beautification" activity. It demeans us as a community to have people treated like trash.

Sincerely,
Carol Denney

Aa Ambassador literally tries to sweep away homeless people in downtown Berkeley, and then orders the homeless men to leave the area. Carol Denney photo

The Problem of So-Called Affordable Housing

by Lynda Carson

On July 16, Public Advocates, a nonprofit law firm that works on the issues of poverty and racial discrimination, announced that the City of Oakland was "bowing to community pressure" and inviting new proposals for affordable housing at a parcel of land on Lake Merritt's East 12th Street after local groups had protested against it as an illegal land deal.

Oakland activists strongly condemned the original deal to sell the city-owned parcel of land to UrbanCore, a developer that planned to construct a 20-story tower with 300 units of luxurious, upscale housing. Public Advocates and Eastlake United for Justice charged that the deal was in violation of the Surplus Land Act governing the sale of publicly owned land.

"We are very excited about the city's decision to comply with the law and address community concerns by re-opening the process," said Monica Garcia, who lives just two blocks from the site, and is a member of Eastlake United for Justice, a neighborhood group advocating for affordable housing in Oakland.

"As we move forward we urge the city to work with the community to ensure that affordable housing is built on the E. 12th parcel, and remain true to the idea that public land should be used for the public good," Garcia said.

Now that the land deal that would have illegally benefited UrbanCore has been scuttled by city officials and the parcel is now up for bid as a possible site for so-called affordable housing, the question arises as to what kind of affordable housing site it will eventually become.

Many already question whether the so-called affordable housing projects in Oakland and the Bay Area are really affordable to most disabled persons receiving their income through SSI, or are affordable for retired persons receiving Social Security. It is evident that many are not affordable to low-income people.

As one example, in 2014, at the Avalon Senior Housing project located at 3850 San Pablo in Oakland, the East Bay Asian Local Development Corporation (EBALDC) required that people seeking housing at this subsidized housing project must have a minimum income of at least twice the rent. Studio apartments were going for $600.00 a month at this project, one-bedroom apartments were going for as high as $712.00 per month, and two-bedroom apartments were going for $845.00. Many low-income, disabled persons receiving SSI disability payments and retired persons on Social Security could not afford to reside there due to the minimum income requirements.

In 2014, the average monthly Social Security check for a single retired worker was $1,294.00. Many retired and disabled workers earn much less than $1,294.00 per month as Social Security income or SSI, and as a result, retired and disabled persons face exclusion at many so-called affordable housing projects in Oakland, and throughout the Bay Area.

The average SSI (disability) benefit payment in California was $877.40 per month. The average TANF (CalWorks) family in California is an adult with two children that receives $510 a month in benefits. General Assistance in California during 2014 paid $336 per month to a single person. Food Stamps were $189 per month, and persons receiving SSI/SSP are not allowed in the program.

When taking a closer look at many so-called affordable housing projects in Oakland and the Bay Area, it appears that unless the disabled persons receiving SSI or Social Security benefits also have Section 8 housing vouchers (Housing Choice Vouchers), most disabled persons on SSI and retired persons on Social Security do not have an income high enough to reside in many affordable housing projects.

IRONHORSE HOUSING IN OAKLAND

As another example of a project with "minimum income requirements" that discriminate against the poor and disabled, we can look at the Ironhorse affordable housing project at Central Station, a 99-unit housing project developed by Bridge Housing. The project is funded in part by a federally regulated government program called the Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program (LIHTC), as well as other sources of funding to subsidize the housing project, according to Bridge Housing.

In 2010, Bridge Housing announced that the Ironhorse so-called affordable housing project delivers 99 apartments for families earning up to 50 percent of the local area medium income (AMI).

Out of 99 apartments, there are 20 housing units at Ironhorse set aside for those with the lowest incomes residing in units receiving rent subsidies from the federal government through the Oakland Housing Authority.

The Ironhorse project owned by Bridge Housing demands that a person seeking to rent a one-bedroom apartment for $460 per month, must earn between $15,771 to $19,650 per year to reside in what is called Tier 1. The minimum income requirement is way more than the average retired person on Social Security, or a disabled person on SSI earns, and leaves them out in the cold unless they have a Section 8 voucher.

In Tier 2 at Ironhorse, a person renting a one-bedroom apartment that rents for $541 per month, must have an income between $18,549 to $22,925 per year. In Tier 3, Bridge Housing demands that a person renting a one-bedroom apartment for $622 per month, must have an income between $21,326 to $26,200. There are no minimum income requirements for Section 8 applicants (Housing Choice Voucher Applicants), according to their application documents.

The harsh reality at this so-called affordable housing project subsidized by taxpayers is that most disabled persons on SSI, or retired persons with Social Security as an income, face discrimination at this site due to the "minimum income requirements" imposed by Bridge Housing, a $2 billion so-called nonprofit housing developer.

Many other affordable housing projects in the Bay Area are imposing minimum income requirements that end up excluding countless poor, disabled, senior and homeless tenants from ever being considered for housing. Many of these housing complexes are praised as supposed places where the nation is demonstrating its commitment to helping disabled and poor people to find housing. But once we do the math and add up the rental costs, we find that too many deserving people are excluded.

The Revolutionaries Met Today

by Carol Denney

the revolutionaries met today
to show the world a better way
and the men all had a lot to say
and the women cleaned up after
the women cleaned up after
the women cleaned up after
the men all had a lot to say
and the women cleaned up after

the revolutionaries marched along
they chanted and they sang a song
they all went on about what's wrong
and the women brought the food
the women brought the food
the women brought the food
and on and on about what's wrong
and the women brought the food

the revolutionaries made a pact
to blow things up and not look back
and always have each others' back
and the women paid the rent
the women paid the rent
the women paid the rent
and always have each others' back
and the women paid the rent

At the VA Clinic

by Claire J. Baker

A veteran of Korea
shuttles patients
and visitors

all around the grounds.
In spare time, he makes
maple and oak canes

for younger vets,
paints the fresh canes
red-white-and-blue.

After an NPR Newscast

by Claire J. Baker

"Birds are on the decline,"
especially sparrows and larks,
while "twittering people"
are on the rise —
don't ask this poet why or now.

Dear remaining birds,
if you have a song to sing,
please sing it now.

The Homeless Reservation

I surmised grimly that I was to be put into the Homeless Reservation. I had never heard of anyone leaving there, alive or dead. People disappeared, never to be heard from again. Politicians had arrived at the final solution to the "problem" of homeless people.

Short Story by Jack Bragen

I wasn't looking my best that morning. I hadn't shaved for a few days and my hair was unwashed following a grueling experience at the IRS. Still, I had to go out in public to get some groceries, as my refrigerator and cupboards were bare.

I had arranged for some time off from my job at the law firm, where I worked as a file clerk and word processor. I thought it would be good enough to put on a hat for my trip to the grocery store so I wouldn't freak people out with my dirty hair.

When I got out of my car, an old model Toyota that barely ran and that I was soon intending to replace, I noticed a uniformed man who stood next to the entrance to the grocery store. However, I didn't recognize the uniform, nor did I know what it represented. I tipped my hat to the gentleman, and I proceeded to go into the store for groceries.

I exited the store with a cartload of food. Abruptly, I noticed that there was a tow truck, and realized that it was my vehicle being towed. Then I saw that two more uniformed men had joined the first, and they were looking at me.

"What the hell!" I exclaimed. I walked toward the tow truck, hoping to have a word with the tow driver. I turned around at the sound of my shopping cart rolling, and I saw it strike the bumper of someone's new Camry. The Camry owner got out of his car and was obviously quite angry. I profusely apologized to the Camry owner and gave him my insurance information.

Meanwhile, my vehicle was gone, and I was stranded there with a cartload of groceries. I checked for my cellphone and realized it was in my shirt pocket as usual. I was going to phone for a taxicab, when the three unformed men closed in on me.

Homeless Detention

"Take off your hat and your glasses," they ordered.

I replied, "I will do nothing of the kind."

"You are under citizen's arrest. You had better cooperate."

Another of the uniformed men said, "We're here to help. You deserve a home."

"You're obviously homeless and you need our help," said the third. However, his tone wasn't sympathetic, it was cold and hostile.

"Turn around."

A number of spectators had gathered, and a couple of them were laughing.

The man held a Taser and it was aimed at my chest. I again reached for my phone with the intent of calling the police. The man's Taser went off, and I hit the ground from the shock. My grocery cart began rolling again, and one of the three men grabbed it.

One of the men sat on top of me, while another wound wire around my wrists. They pulled me to my feet, and I was escorted to the back of a van. Two of the men got into the van with me, and as the van was driven off, I noted that my groceries were being loaded into the third man's new Chevrolet.

"You assholes," I shouted.

"You will speak to us respectfully or we will punish you."

"What is this about? Do you think I'm homeless or something? Am I being taken to the Homeless Reserve?"

"It is clear that you need our help."

"I'm not homeless. I have a job and I rent a very nice apartment."

"That is obviously not true. You were living in your car."

Under his breath, one of the two men in the van said to the other something I wasn't intended to hear. "Could he be a psychotic?"

The other replied, also quietly, "Of course he is."

"When we take a rest stop, we will give you some medication that we hope will make you feel better."

My wrists hurt a lot from the wire wound around them, and my hands had gone numb from lack of blood circulation.

"Can you loosen these wires? My hands are going to fall off."

"We'll see to your needs when we stop for gas. That will be in another 50 miles."

The van drove endlessly and I realized we were headed for the desert. I surmised grimly that I was to be put into the Homeless Reservation. I had never heard of anyone leaving there, either alive or deceased. It was a way that people essentially disappeared, never to be heard from again. Politicians had arrived at what they believed to be a final solution to the "problem" of homeless people.

Welcome to the Reservation

The van entered the front gate of the facility, and I saw barbed-wire fences stretching into the distance.

I mouthed an obscenity.

"Not another word from you."

The van drove down a narrow strip of pavement flanked by flat, dry, barren ground. Not even an occasional tuft of grass was visible. We reached a giant complex of bungalows. Letters and numbers were visible on the buildings as the van drove through the middle of the complex.

The driver stopped and put the vehicle in park. He retrieved a cellphone from his waist, but first his hand hovered over the Taser weapon, as though he was tempted to use it again. He spoke into the phone.

"This is G. H. 37, and we have a customer, male, code one-nine-five. We are in the middle of the compound. Where should we bring the customer?"

The reply was audible to me. "We see you and will meet you at your current location." The voice on the other end apparently chortled before hanging up.

Five uniformed men emerged from the passageways that ran between bungalows and stood adjacent to the van. Four of them were smiling, while the fifth had a blank expression on his face. The door to the van slid open.

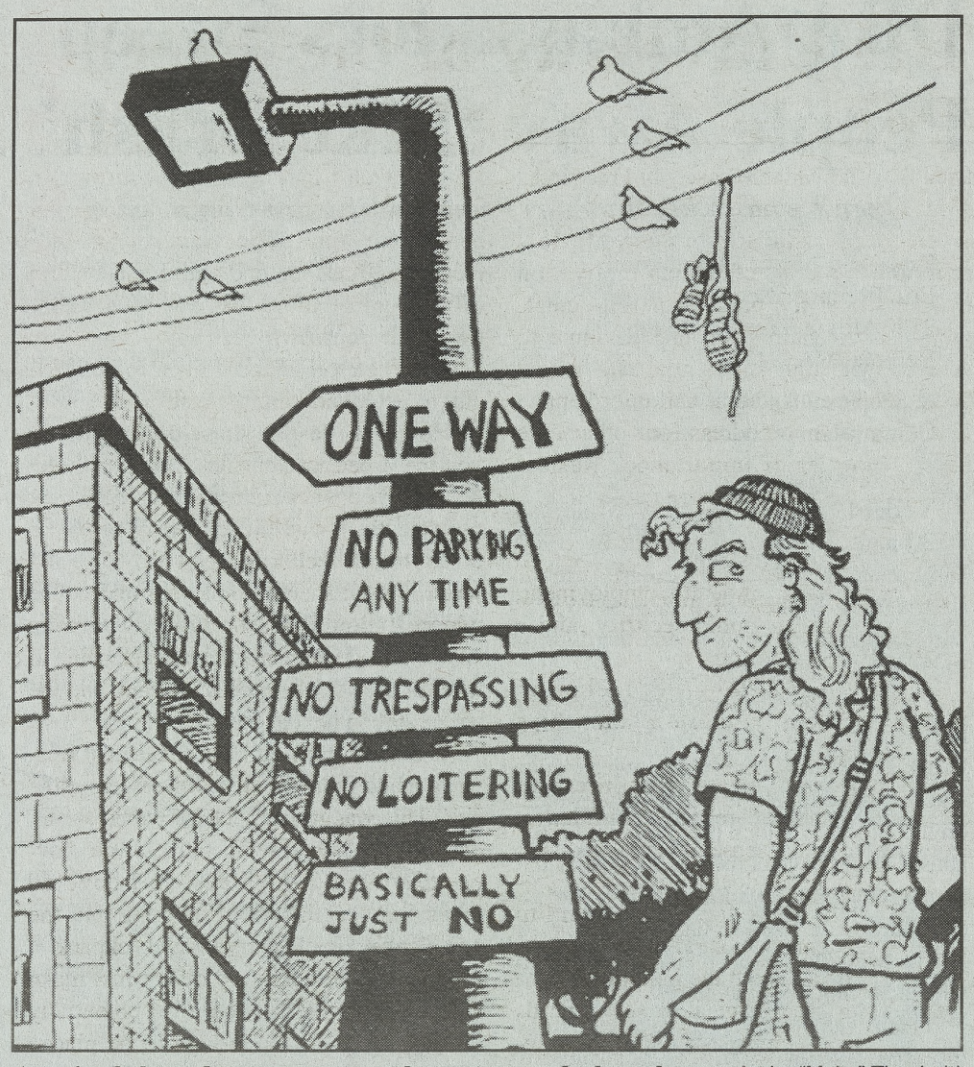
"Step out."

With difficulty due to my hands being tied, I stepped out of the van. My hands were killing me because of the wire around my wrists. I was incredibly thirsty, and my bladder was full to the point of being painful. One of the men snipped the wire off my wrists.

"A bit tight, huh?" the man said. I nodded. He said, in an odd tone, "Don't worry, it is not so bad here."

The same man walked to the driver's window of the van and handed the driver an envelope. The driver nodded, opened the envelope, and counted out a huge wad of cash. He smiled, started the ignition, and the van drove off in the direction from where we had come.

"Welcome to Fantasy Island."



A societal clampdown on anyone who appears to be homeless. Art by "Moby" Theobald

I was led to a portapotty where I peed endlessly. My hands throbbed from the reinstatement of blood circulation. I kneaded them and flexed them. I stepped out of the porta-potty.

Alone and Forsaken

The setting sun was unmitigated by even the smallest wisp of cloud, and the dry, flat dirt that was everywhere was featureless. However, I could see mountains at a great distance, almost invisible because of a layer of brownish haze. I felt utter despair, and it was all I could do not to cry.

"It is five o'clock, and you have time for two hours of work."

I lay on my assigned bunk, and my mind was filled with thoughts of doom. Soon, others entered the room, took turns drinking tepid water from a water fountain, and got onto their bunks.

"New guy?"

"Yeah, this is a new one. He looks well-maintained."

"That will change."

"Don't worry, sir. We're nice here. We're not mean and nasty like in a regular prison. What's your name?"

I replied, "John. And I don't belong here."

"None of us does, Max."

"I said my name is John."

"I heard that. Now your name is Max. Like Mad Max because you're mad."

"Okay," I replied, "you can call me Max."

I made friends with several of the men. I was told there was a section for female detainees, but we would never be able to access that area. A man had pointed to an electrified fence on the south side of the grounds. "Damn," he had said.

The days were full of pointless, back-breaking work that didn't produce anything. The food was scant and barely edible. And there was no entertainment except for a couple of decks of cards that had been smuggled in. One morning I awoke with an idea...

An Unexpected Friend

I asked around about a cellphone it was rumored one of the men had. I didn't make any progress for the next week, and didn't want to push it for fear of the guards finding out. Then someone woke me at about three in the morning. He put a hand to my mouth and whispered to remain quiet. I realized this was one of the staff of the facility. It was the cook. All the men in the room were busily sleeping, and it would have taken a lot to awaken them.

He led me to the back of the main staff building, and I was terrified that it was some sort of trick that would lead to punishment. Between two of the bricks was a landline phone wire that clearly no one would ever notice. The cook retrieved a miniature phone from his pocket, connected it to the phone wire and handed it to me.

"You don't owe me for this," he said. "This is a friend's gesture. You can talk as long as you want."

I phoned the law office where I had worked up until being detained, and I left a detailed voicemail. I shook hands with the cook. "I do owe you," I said.

"Don't worry about it. This should not be done to any human being."

Back to "Civilization"

When I was taken back to civilization, I was treated almost as badly as when I had been detained. I was dropped off in front of the same supermarket where I had been detained six months previously.

The wires on my wrists were removed, and I stood there, a spectacle in the middle of Monday afternoon shoppers. My cellphone was given back to me. I looked around and saw that the same uniformed man who had arrested me months before stood in the same spot, and stared at me as if he was about to arrest me all over again.

I phoned a cousin who lived nearby. I couldn't be caught loitering, and I realized I had the same 20 dollars in my pants pocket that I originally had. I went into Starbucks, ordered a drink, and waited to be picked up by my cousin. I wondered if I would ever feel safe again.

"It Is What It Is"

by Claire J. Baker

I dislike that glib
summing up of
hurtful experience:
"It is what it is."
What happened to
sincere concern?
A long warm hug?
Tears shared?
Tissues provided?
A ride home
to a warm bed?

Have we forgotten
how to be kind
as in kind-red?

The University of the Streets

from page 1

friends with available space and resources won out, and I became homeless.

The psychologist Abraham Maslow proposed a theory of human motivation that looked at the process of self-actualization, which aims for an individual to achieve their highest potential as a human being. Self-actualization can only happen if you are able to address four other core needs. In order of importance, Maslow identified the following core needs.

1. *Physiological* need for food, water, clothing, shelter and sleep.

2. *Safety* needs for health, employment, steady income, personal security, and a safety net in times of crisis.

3. *Love and belonging*, including friendships, family, close relationships and intimacy.

4. *Self-esteem*, meaning both respect from others and self-respect, confidence, achievement, and a sense of being unique.

Maslow's theory does a good job of providing a framework for those hoping to achieve self-actualization. However, it does not go into detail about the individuals who grapple with physiological or safety needs and the personal impact of the daily struggle to meet those needs.

As a person experiencing homelessness, daily life is made up of the struggle to meet your physiological and safety needs and overcome the obstacles that arise. Small comforts I had taken for granted, such as access to a refrigerator, toilet, shower, and bed, were painful reminders of my current situation and the new obstacles to daily functioning. Locating and obtaining food that didn't require much preparation, along with filling up and hauling a water bottle, were my primary concerns.

Besides water and nutrients, human beings also require sleep. Not having housing puts you at the mercy of the few — if any — shelters in your area. Even if you're fortunate enough to find a shelter, there's a good chance that you will be turned away due to a lack of beds.

Sleeping in a shelter is already tough because of being in close, crowded quarters with people who snore, talk in their sleep, haven't had access to a shower in weeks or are experiencing serious mental health symptoms. Also, rigid shelter rules mean you must contend with lights on and off at arbitrary times that may totally conflict with your own best hours for sleep. All these factors make it even more difficult to get a good night's rest.

However, despite these difficulties, if you get a bed in a shelter, it's almost like winning the lottery compared to sleeping on the streets. I was turned away multiple times from a shelter in Redwood City, and when I asked shelter employees and police where I should go, they didn't have an answer. So, I alternated between sleeping in front of the social services building and the police station next to the shelter.

The noise from cars, the streets and freeways made falling and staying asleep difficult. This was in late October when winter was settling in and temperatures were hovering around 20 degrees, so I covered myself in four layers of clothing and the one blanket I could carry in my backpack.

The cold temperature didn't just make things uncomfortable, but also potentially deadly. I was lucky enough to be placed in housing in mid-November. However, many are not so fortunate. Every year, many homeless individuals freeze to death on Bay Area streets.

Eventually, I became a client for a wrap-around social service agency, which placed me into housing, helped me establish an income and provided medical and mental health services. As part of my recovery plan, and as a solution to my lack of immediate housing, the organization connected me to a local transitional housing program that served primarily homeless individuals and parolees.

This was where I met Michael Rowland, one of my best friends still to this day.

My personal story of education and homelessness is unique to my social place and individual circumstances. I grew up in a white, middle-class, suburban family where educational institutions were trusted.

I was lucky enough to be placed in housing in November as the cold grew potentially deadly. Many are not so fortunate. Every year, many homeless persons freeze to death.

My parents took me to the bookstore and talked to my teachers on a weekly basis.

Michael's experience with education was far different from mine. He dropped out of school in the sixth grade and joined the Hoover Crips, an infamous street gang in South Los Angeles. At 18, he joined the National Guard and proudly served six years. Afterwards, he struggled with alcoholism, health problems and a lack of real opportunity. When his sister, a constant source of love and support, passed away in 2011, it was too much for Michael to handle and he ended up sleeping around Lake Merritt until he got connected to the recovery program.

As I discussed earlier, there is an aura that surrounds UC Berkeley so that when you tell people you go there, they react as if you have the secret key to unlock all the success and knowledge of the world. By contrast, in Michael's case, they usually react to his experience and informal education with indifference or disrespect.

Howard Gardener, an education professor, questioned popular assumptions about what constitutes knowledge when he developed his theory of multiple intelligences. According to his theory, there are nine types of intelligence: visual-spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalistic, existential, linguistic, and logical-mathematical.

Formal education tends to focus on mainly linguistic and logical-mathematical, while sometimes drawing upon visual-spatial. I excelled at UC Berkeley by mastering skills such as crafting research papers and solving mathematical problem sets, but these talents were of little use to me when I became homeless.

Knowing how to apply for food stamps, finding critical services, and maneuvering my body to maintain a healthy temperature were all skills I had to learn quickly on the streets. I struggled with all of these, while others like Michael had insights and tips I never thought about. I was fortunate enough to not have to endure a full winter on the street, while Michael survived two consecutive years living on the streets near Lake Merritt.

However, a majority of people and educational institutions would be quick to label me as more intelligent than Michael. This demonstrates the need to radically reshape the values of educational institutions so they reflect real-world skills. But even more importantly, I think it is a call to personally re-examine our own views and biases of what makes a person intelligent.

While I have experienced the normal first-day jitters before at UC Berkeley, this time they will be different. Because this time around, I will bring with me the hardened reality of someone who has slept on the street, stayed in shelters, and navigated the complicated social service provider network. These experiences made me critical of educational institutions and the underlying privilege of their knowledge. However, as I prepare to re-enter both school and the workforce, I know that if I ever feel alone or need to find inspiration, my friend Michael is one phone call away, ready to relay wisdom or inspire me with tales from his reading class, job as a security guard, or role as transitional house manager.

Michael Rowland and I both appreciate and acknowledge that our current positions in life are due to the opportunities we've been given. But, millions of Americans, including those we see at the Suitcase Clinic week after week, aren't able to access these resources.

The pressures and obstacles of homelessness make it a daily struggle simply to survive. I try and help clients to meet these needs as a Housing/Employment Specialist at the Suitcase Clinic. My hope is that these struggles are only temporary and that they're on their way to experiencing the world beyond the confines of housing instability and physical survival.

Unethical Medical Experiments on U.S. Citizens

The U.S. has an epidemic, not of a communicable disease, but rather one of ill health due to excessive drugging.

by Jack Bragen

The U.S. government has a 239-year history of medical experimentation on human beings without our knowledge or consent, beginning with unethical experiments that were conducted on slaves. In some instances, mutilating surgeries were performed without anesthesia.

Experiments have been conducted by the military, in secret, on U.S. soldiers, citizens and entire towns. Experiments have been conducted by physicians — people in whom we have put our trust — on African American people, on children, on the disabled, and on those less able to speak up on their own behalf.

It is a shocking and disgraceful legacy. People have been unknowingly exposed to radiation. People have been intentionally infected with pathogens without being told of this. People have been infected with syphilis, not informed and not treated. People with mental illness have been exposed to LSD. A man forced into a study comparing three of the newer "atypical antipsychotics" committed suicide.

After only a brief amount of research, I found massive piles of literature reporting on unethical experimentation on humans in the United States. To even begin to report on this subject would take years.

So, drawing on my own experiences as a mental health consumer, I will narrow my focus and report on some recent cases of medical experimentation involving people with mental health issues.

It is clear that the American people are considered a giant pool of experimental subjects for drug companies. Persons diagnosed with mental illness — those who are marginalized in society and who often cannot speak on our own behalf — are experimented upon, often without our consent and against our own best interests. In some instances, this is considered legal. In the name of science, doctors have experimented for many decades on mentally ill people and continue to do so today. In some instances, this is done without our informed consent or knowledge.

When the massively wealthy drug companies come out with new medications for mentally ill people to take, the long-term side effects are not known until people have been exposed to these medications for ten years or more.

In recent years, "atypical antipsychotic" drugs were widely prescribed to people, and it was asserted falsely that these powerful drugs didn't cause extrapyramidal side effects, including tardive dyskinesia and other harmful symptoms. Tardive dyskinesia is a disfiguring disability that involves involuntary movements of the tongue, mouth, face and neck. Much of the time it is irreversible, and may continue to afflict patients even when antipsychotic medication is discontinued.

When I began Zyprexa, one of the widely prescribed atypical antipsychotic drugs, I was at a normal weight and I was quite healthy. Over time, I gained more and more weight, about ten pounds per year, until I became a hundred pounds overweight. I became diabetic. Patients often are not warned that massive weight gain and diabetes are common outcomes.

I continue to take this medication because it works well for me in controlling aggression, and in calming me down. However, now I have cut out about 90 percent of the refined sugar from my diet, and I am sure to get in a fair amount of fruits and vegetables. I've lost about 30 pounds of the weight, and my blood sugar has gone down. I am an example of someone who has narrowly averted a health disaster. I know of others less fortunate.

In addition, typical diabetes medications may cause weight gain over time because they work to move blood sugar from the bloodstream and into the body's cells. The sugar has to go somewhere, and diabetes medications cause the sugar to be more efficiently metabolized. Thus, in the long run, diabetes medications can perpetuate the disease, because they worsen the root cause of the disease: weight.

If you watch any television at all, perhaps you have seen the endless advertisements for newly patented medications. Because of laws that require disclosure of side effects, we hear of a multitude of possible side effects. Drugs used to treat autoimmune diseases such as arthritis work by means of weakening the immune system, and thus, patients are subject to deadly infections.

Antipsychotic medications are now being promoted as a way of fighting depression. This works by suppressing the higher mental functions, and the resultant neurological damage is a very serious consequence of treating depression via a chemical suppression of the mind. In some cases, perhaps the depressed person is still depressed but is no longer aware of it, or is now unable to express it. But these antipsychotic drugs do their work by damaging the higher functions of the mind, so much so that they are referred to as "mind-damaging neuroleptics."

The American people are being railroaded into taking numerous medications which have complications that may trigger further illness, and end up necessitating more medications. This situation isn't limited to people with mental health issues.

The motive could be some kind of grand plan for social engineering, or simply the endless pursuit of massive profits by the pharmaceutical industry. I don't know what is behind it. However, at this point, the U.S. has an epidemic, not of a communicable disease, but rather one of ill health due to excessive drugging.

Blues for the 99 Percent

The Corporate Attack on America's Roots Music

from page 1

prison, starting with people who are black, brown, and poor white. At the same time, Mr. Fat Cat has picked the pockets of the 99%.

Because of the grip on the political system by the 1%, federal tax dollars that should be paying off the national debt or building bridges and trains and solar panels are going instead to build more bombs.

The nation's mayors shut down the schools and mental health clinics, then wonder why our streets are full of crime and sorrow. People with nowhere to turn, often turn violence on themselves and their neighbors.

As people lose jobs, houses and education, the 1% invest in over-policing (including the military weapons brandished in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014) to hold back the rage.

African American members of the lower 99, where the blues comes from, have been subjected to the oppression and lies of the 1% rulers for 400 years. Now more of us are forced to experience exploitation from the same beast.

Blues can't cure society, but it can get people out of the dumps. Kurt Vonnegut, before his death in 2007, called African American music "America's greatest contribution to the world ... the remedy for a world-wide epidemic of depression."

Blues grew up from the ground. It's the root of America's popular music — *gospel, rock, jazz, soul, funk, R&B,* hiphop — even part of country music. Producer and songwriter Willie Dixon often said, "Blues is the root. Other music is the fruit."

Blues has a call and a response, a rhythm and a swing. The music makes you feel better. Watch a blues audience, eyes half closed, tapping their toes — or in a lively mood, shouting out their comments on the singer's lines. Blues can tell any story — happy or sad, scary or funny. It doesn't solve the world's problems, but it brings folks together, and that's a start.

Where to find this healing blues music? Don't look in the major media owned by the 1%. The music industrial complex doesn't like to play real blues (or air real news). Each blues song comes from the heart of an ordinary person. It cannot be mass duplicated and controlled. The blues is freedom. The blues is truth.

How I Found the Blues

Like many fans, I got into blues music to cure my own blues. The Creator blessed me with the personality of an obsessed reformer and writer. As a kid, I haunted the Philadelphia library for biographies of pioneers: Susan B. Anthony, Jane Addams, Amelia Earhart, Harriet Tubman, Booker T. Washington.

In the fighting pioneer tradition of my father's Scot-Irish family, I always swam upstream like the heroes I read about. My mother's grandparents were Russian-Rumanian Jewish immigrants. Some were also known for playing music and occasional political hell-raising.

At 13, when I watched Martin Luther King speak on TV at the March on Washington, I started to understand how unfairly black people had been treated. I wanted to help.

At West Virginia University, studying for my journalism degree, I heard talks by Muhammad Ali and Dick Gregory. I overheard African-American students, clustered at their favorite table in the Mountainlair student union, debate Black Power and music. "You like soul music?" said Ron Wilkerson, one of my college buddies. "You oughta dig Miles Davis. And John Lee Hooker." Many of the black students had it together. Their teachers in segregated high schools held Masters and PhDs but couldn't get jobs in white schools. So they had stayed in the community, passing all their smarts to the kids growing up under them.

But no sooner than African-American culture began showing its beauty and power, it was driven down again. Not only were urban anti-poverty programs shut off in the late 1960s, but also highways and urban renewal blasted through black business districts. Blues and jazz clubs were bulldozed, from Detroit's Hastings Street to Beale Street in Memphis and the Triangle District in West Virginia's own capital, Charleston.

America's "consumer" economy consumes land and people and culture, replacing everything with manufactured imitations. Cities and streets were named for Indian tribes after the army and the settlers killed them off. Likewise, in many places with "blues" in the name, the music has been killed off and replaced with imitations.

Partly because of my activism, I was forced out of the family business in the late 1990s. Losing my job gave me the blues. I was drawn to the music that had spawned those soul hits I'd danced to in the 1960s. Growing up to Broadway show tunes and Beethoven, I learned a new set of revered names: the blues piano players Roosevelt Sykes, Memphis Slim, Big Maceo Merriwether, Katie Webster, Big Moose Walker, Otis Spann. I took blues piano classes at Augusta Heritage summer blues camp, in my own state, at Elkins, West Virginia. Each year I'd go home, practice with records and tapes, sit in with local bands, and drive occasionally to blues jams in Washington, D.C.

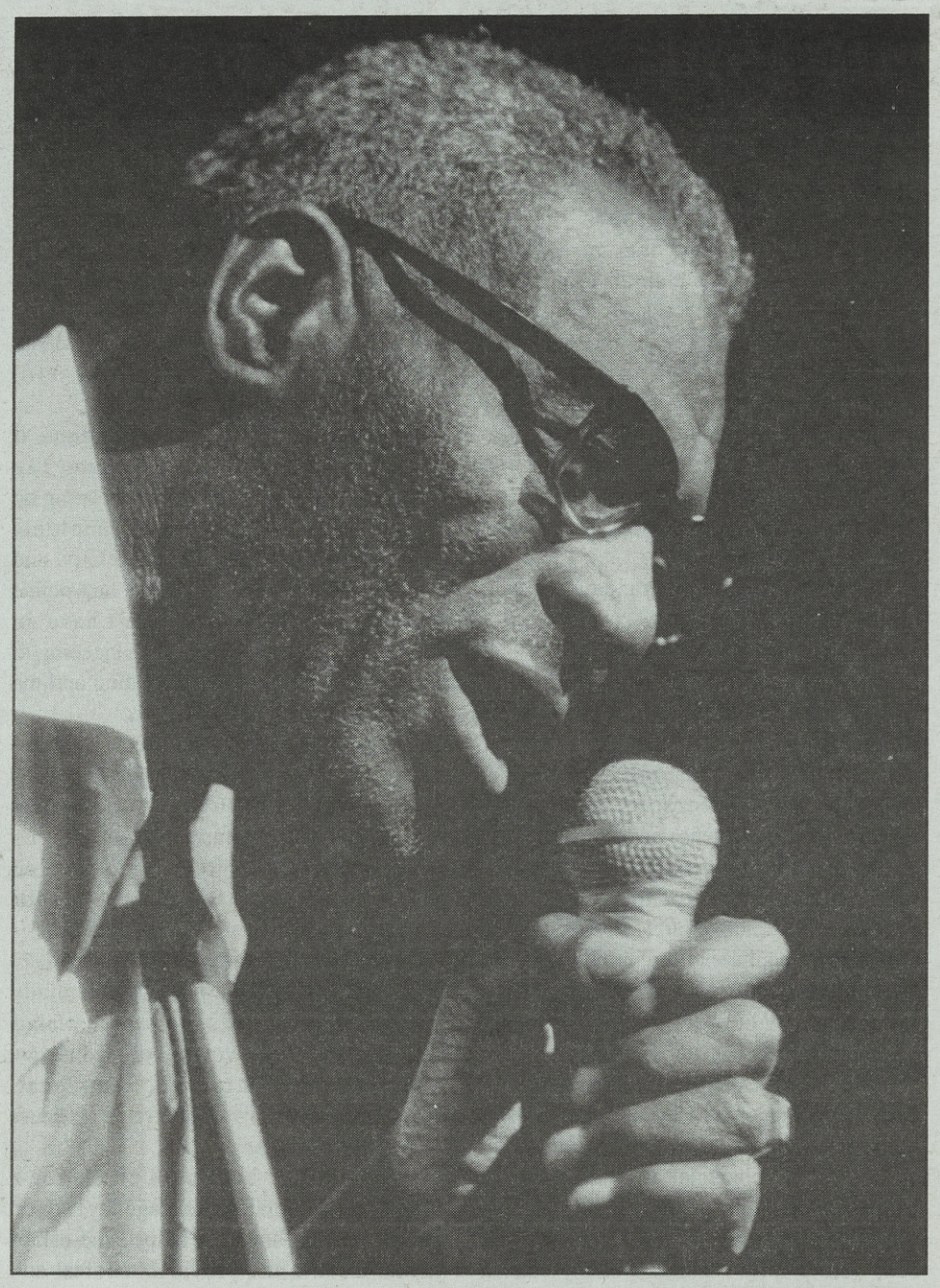
The Loss of Maxwell Street

In the year 2000, I read on the D.C. Blues Society website that Chicago musicians and fans were calling for help. The city was about to tear down Maxwell Street, the birthplace of Chicago blues. Maxwell Street was the century-old, open-air marketplace where people of all cultures mixed and mingled and shopped and danced. With my daughter gone on to college, I was free to pursue another cause. Maybe a Martin Luther King dream.

I hopped a train for the Windy City. Longtime activist and Roosevelt University professor Steve Balkin, known on the street as "the Fess," took me to the street's famous 24-hour hotdog stand. Nearby on a plywood bandstand cobbled by bluesman Frank "Sonny" Scott, musicians played hour after hour for weeks, protesting the demolition: Jimmie Lee Robinson, the lanky "Lonely Traveler" in cowboy boots, and the Queen of Maxwell Street, 80-year-old Johnnie Mae Dunson Smith. The Maxwell Street Foundation website now memorializes the grief and the history (at http://www.maxwellstreetfoundation.org).

By 2002, the wrecking ball had claimed Maxwell Street. The city had ignored our protests. Jimmie Lee, dying of cancer, had taken his own life. But several dozen blues musicians were still playing in Chicago, keeping the spirit alive.

I'd played some gigs as a coffeehouse piano songstress but knew little about playing in a band. Maybe I could find a struggling band leader who'd let me learn, in exchange for my help writing their bio and website.



Howlin' Wolf singing in 1972. Wolf's hard-charging blues band first recorded in Memphis, then took the spirit of the Mississippi Delta blues to Chicago.

I returned to Chicago in March 2003. Like they say, it's a tough town. A clique of younger guys, some black, some white, elbowed my newbie self out of a North Side club jam. They played so fast I couldn't keep up with their funk and rock. They didn't want to hear me trying to shadow Otis Spann; they wanted synthesizer sounds. I felt no swing nor groove, just flying fingers and screeching amplifiers more appropriate for rock than blues. I fled the club, wheeling my 88 keys out the door.

Poet and critic Sterling Plumpp, who rose from Mississippi sharecropping to a post office job and then to a professorship in Chicago, stated in Fernando Jones' book *I Was There When the Blues was Red Hot*: "My perception is that the White, Yuppie Lincoln Park audience tends to like high-energy music. They think that blues should show some sort of relationship to rock'n'roll. Therefore a great deal of potentially significant Black blues musicians distort what the music is about to please that audience."

The Blues and Community

So, what is the blues supposed to be about on its home turf? Chicago harmonica player Billy Branch, who started the idea of "Blues in the Schools," explains community participation to critic David Whiteis in the book *Chicago Blues: Portraits and Stories*. "It's call-and-response, how the audience and performers react to each other.... There's something in the Black experience that defies, probably, definition.... It's an oral tradition —'Yeah baby!' 'That's what I'm talking 'bout!' 'I hear you!' "

That tradition called to me. Real blues is not deafening; it's not in a hurry. It's personal. It tells stories. It's hospitable, even to those from outside the hood.

I decided to test my early piano skills in another tourist club: the Monday night jam at Buddy Guy's Legends. The wiry, dark-skinned drummer in Jimmy Burns's band, I could see, was really into it. Totally living in the moment of the music, he drove the group with a crisp and swingy backbeat. A world of expressions from joy to pain flickered across his face. At the end of each line of 12-bar blues, he'd add magnificent little rumbles and flourishes.

The drummer wore a blue-and-red sports jersey and a backwards baseball cap, more in the hiphop fashion than the felt hat and fancy shirt of a bluesman. His wide-set eyes seemed to look in different directions. One eye, I learned later, had been damaged several years ago by a minor stroke that luckily did not affect his hands or voice. Or was it the time he fell off the swing as a little kid and hit his head?

At the end of the song, the drummer came back from whatever planet he was on. With quick, spidery hands, he switched the drums from a left-hand setup back to right-handed for the next drummer. Then he moved to the front of the stage and picked up a microphone. With a nod to the audience, he hummed a musical riff to the guitar player and directed the bass and drums to come in.

The music boiled up into a one-chord trance song, something like John Lee Hooker or Howlin' Wolf would lay down. The groove reached out like a whirlwind. A huge voice swept through the room, pouring out the pain of his soul and many others. It was as if the great, 6-foot-4-inch, 300-pound Wolf had come back to life and was howling through the singer's slender frame.

This was no imitation; this was blues. Tourists looked up from their catfish and beer, startled. Then they applauded.

As the band took a break, Jimmy Burns began calling us, the wannabe blues musicians, to the stage. When they called "Barrelhouse Bonni" I sat gingerly at the unfamiliar keyboard and played the

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Blues for the 99 Percent

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chords I'd learned at Augusta Heritage Blues camp in West Virginia. Most of the guitar guys were used to playing with other guitars rather than with a piano, and preferred to drown me out. I was glad people couldn't hear all my wrong notes anyway. When the song ended, someone tapped me on the shoulder. It was the wiry singer and drummer who had channeled Wolf.

"I like the way you play," he said. "Not too many folks play piano that way anymore."

"Thank you," I said, nearly falling out of my chair. "I'm still learning. I loved your drumming and singing. Who are you?"

He Played with Legends

"I'm Larry Taylor." He pointed to the band leader. "Jimmy Burns is my uncle. My stepdad was Eddie Taylor. He was on VeeJay and other record labels. Toured all over the world. Played guitar with Jimmy Reed."

"Wow, you're the real deal," I said. Blues, like oldtime Appalachian mountain music, is often passed down in families.

"Yep. I'm a real bluesman. Grew up with it right in my house," he said. He'd played on stage with legends like John Lee Hooker, Junior Wells, Albert Collins. "The stuff they're playing in these clubs these days, some of it ain't the real blues.

"Some of these younger guys, don't matter if they black, they ashamed of the blues," Larry explained. "They used to know how to play. But the old guys, a lot of them are gone. And the younger guys, they've played the modern style of R&B for so many years they forget how to do the traditional blues. Or they speed it up and play too loud like rock. They act scared of the feelings in the music. Can't handle it. They play a song fast so they can get through it."

"Bet you could get a lot of people to come out and hear the real blues," I said. "The blues societies are always talking 'Keep the Blues Alive.' So why don't you have your own band?"

"I've thought about it," he admitted. "Band leaders are the ones who make money in this business. Side musicians, they just don't get paid very well."

I told him my dream of playing in a Chicago blues band and promoting a heritage African American artist.

"I've got some tapes of my stepdad playing," Larry said. "He died back in 1985. Want to see them?"

Six months later, Larry Taylor set about forming his own blues and soul band. He'd bring back the forgotten hits of his stepdad's generation and his own.

Surely promoters would snap up a real bluesman with Larry Taylor's heritage — a little guy with a big voice, a band leader full of soul and rhythm. Even if I lacked music business connections, I could look up festival and club venues, and send out a bio of Larry and a CD with a few of his songs. His calendar should fill up with gigs in no time!

So I thought. Now it's been 10 years. Larry is 10 years older, still struggling to raise his kids on the West Side of Chicago, as shots are fired, jobs dry up, drugs are sold on street corners, people are getting shot, and schools and mental health clinics are closing around them.

The urban blues get worse every day — with less music to compensate. Maybe we should have heeded the song by Larry's former bandleader, A.C. Reed: "I'm in the Wrong Business."

Is Larry's music worth promoting? Judge for yourself. (See http://www.larrytaylorchicagoblues.com)

Many other things have contributed to Larry's blues story and to mine. Whatever mistakes we've made in trying to promote Larry, we're not imagining these obstacles in the business. Jim ONeal, founding editor of *Living Blues* magazine, spotted them over 20 years ago in his article "The Blues: A Hidden Culture" (*Living Blues*, March/April 1990).

"The young black bluesman usually finds no easy road to success even when he is heard.... The upper level is narrow and constricted, populated by the veterans who have been there for years. They have the reputations, the recognition, the better recording outlets, the top management, and they have the history. Their gains are hard earned and well deserved, and if they protect their positions by preserving the hierarchy (with the consent and support of the blues audience), it's understandable."

O'Neal, now an archivist at Bluesoterica, went on to recommend: "Maybe what is needed most in the new age of blues is a push toward establishing up-and-coming blues talent within the black community, on black radio, in black publications and in black music awards. The black audience for blues is still large, though not particularly well served by radio and the recording industry."

O'Neal who is white, noted that black DJs seemed content to play old blues and soul records without searching for younger performers of this type of music. Some "southern soul-blues" artists do get played. While the vocals come across with soul, much of their music doesn't have the same sound; synthesized keyboards can't replace piano and horns.

Sharing the Pain and Beauty

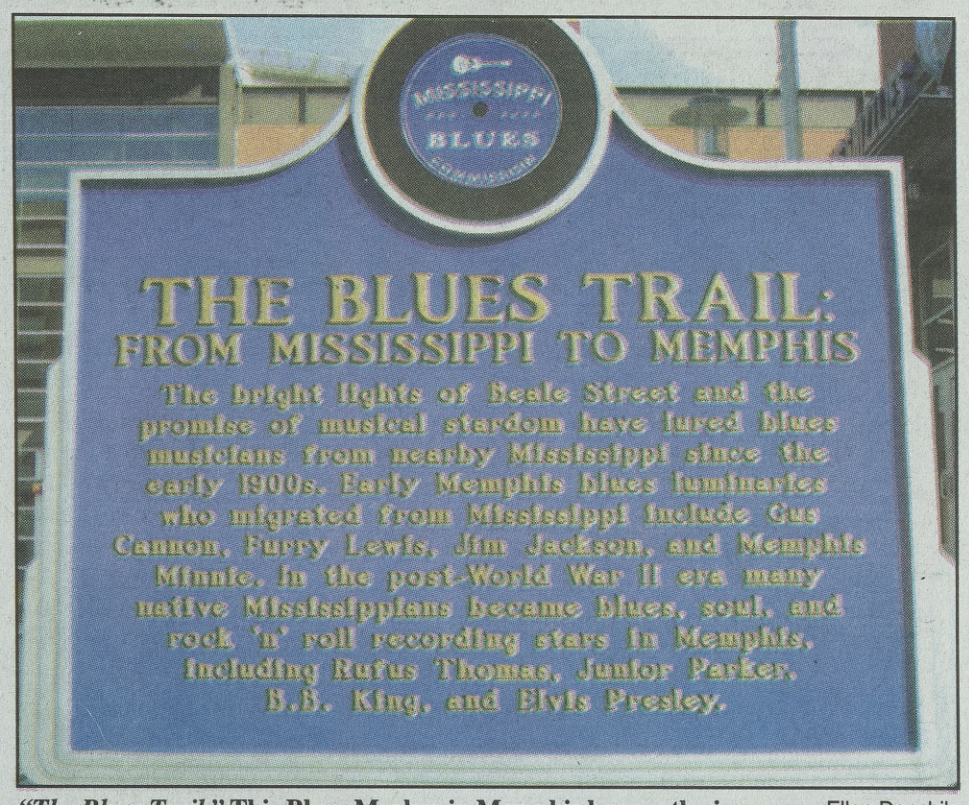
Heritage blues musicians have the gift of pain and the challenge of sharing it. Their experiences tap into the beauty and the unrealized dreams not only in African-American culture, but in all of human life. They can make us feel what they are feeling, and that bond draws people together. The greatest blues artists are the ones who feel the deepest pain. Because they carry so much pain, they are strong and fragile. Appreciation keeps them going.

Fernando Jones, harp and guitar player and songwriter, points out in his 1988/2004 book *I Was There When the Blues was Red Hot*, that fellow black scholars sometimes fail to allow their culture to take credit for the blues. The late bass player and blues songwriter and producer Willie Dixon often said, "Blues are the root. Other music is the fruit."

Blues is famous worldwide, but not always valued in the community. The Blues and the Spirit symposia produced by Dr. Janice Monti at Dominican University since 2008 have made a dent in this, giving Black scholars a chance to address the value of the blues. (See http://www.dom.edu/blues-and-spirit-iv)

Fernando also quotes Chicago Black promoter and politician Ralph Metcalfe: "The reason we (Blacks) shy away from the Blues is because of our self-hatred.... We worship the white man's gods more so than being concerned with our own heritage and origins. Blues musicians in the beginning were the traveling minstrels. Black educators do not teach this in school because they have not been trained themselves.... At Columbia University I went to the music department; it was filled with Brahms, Beethoven, and Bach (but not) Waters, Wolf and Wells.... Blues is the classical music of black people."

If the community ignores its blues men and women and does not feel their presence, or lets the world exploit them without feeding their families, they will die off. Not just from a broken heart, rejection and starvation, but from being stifled from sharing their music.



"The Blues Trail." **This Blues Marker in Memphis honors the journey of many blues artists from rural Mississippi to Beale Street and beyond.** Ellen Danchik photo

The Delta Blues Museum in Clarksdale, Mississippi, is a fantastic showcase for the blues music that was born in the Mississippi Delta. Ellen Danchik photo

I have seen Larry Taylor's personal suffering. He has spoken out about these things since before I came to Chicago, and spoke out again in our book *Stepson of the Blues*. His singing is deeper, his repertoire broader, his rhythm more profound than ever. Since 2008 he has not been hired to perform in Chicago's annual blues festival, nor hired by a national or international festival.

Meanwhile, some media are saying blues are now a white thing and that's all there is to it. This is pure B.S. Portraying the Blues without Black people is like portraying my grandmother's Scotland with mariachi players instead of bagpipers. You can't keep the blues alive without ongoing generations of live, authentic, professional African American blues men and women studying and playing the classical music of their culture.

The blockage has to end. Their energy has to be released. When it is, everybody benefits. Blues is the music of survival. Life goes on. We all gonna boogie — all night long!

Bonni McKeown is a journalist, activist and blues piano player who supports heritage musicians upholding the blues and soul tradition. She wrote the music section of the Maxwell Street Foundation history website (see http://www.maxwellstreetfoundation.org) and has written a blog "West Side Blues" for the *Austin Weekly News*.

Bonni promoted Larry Taylor and worked with Larry to produce his 2004 debut CD "They Were in This House," reissued in 2011 by Wolf Records. http://www.larrytaylorchicagoblues.com . She co-authored Stepson of the Blues, a limited-edition autobiography of Taylor, in 2010, and wrote a screenplay "The Rhythm and the Blues" based on part of Taylor's life story. For more informationm see www.barrelhousebonni.com

Will They Let You Be Poor Anymore

by Carol Denney

will they let you be poor anymore
can you just get a room or a bed
without three thousand dollars
in first month's and last month's
for just a roof over your head

will they let you be poor anymore
with a job somewhere pushing a broom
washing up dishes
and flipping a stack
won't even get you a room

do we all have to be CEOs
or work for VC-funded techs
do we all have to work
sixty hours a week
at jobs where we're all nervous wrecks

will they let you be poor anymore
and work for an honest day's pay
did it all go to China
or India and if it did
then let's all go today

I don't need much to be happy
I may be poor but not sad
it's always just scrambling around
for a roof and a job
that can make me feel bad

will they let you be poor anymore
and go home at the end of the day
a place of your own
just a room to call home
earned with an honest day's pay

Orwell Foresaw the Vast Expansion of Surveillance and Total Loss of Freedom

During times of universal deceit, telling the truth becomes a revolutionary act.

- George Orwell (1903 - 1950)

If Orwell's chilling prediction of omnipresent surveillance has already come true, most of us might never know. The culture of surveillance and control creeps upward in subtle steps, and most of us are blithely unaware of the change.

by Jack Bragen

George Orwell sent his landmark novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (alternately entitled *1984*), to his publisher on Dec. 4, 1948. Orwell created this insightful "negative utopia" by closely examining the erosion of individual freedom, governmental surveillance and enforced conformity that were already well advanced in his own time.

Orwell's novel remains a fascinating indictment of a future where human rights and the individual conscience are crushed underfoot by the national security state.

A central component of the plot was the surveillance of the novel's protagonist, Winston Smith, whose every waking hour was spied upon by the nameless, faceless bureaucrats of the tyrannical regime.

When Orwell wrote his book, in 1948, the transistor was still in the early stages of development, and it was not known if it would replace vacuum tube technology. (The first mass-produced AM transistor radios didn't appear until about 1954.)

Thus, there was no way that Orwell could have predicted the invention of microprocessors decades later, or the ever more powerful computers that have enormously magnified the surveillance capacity of both governments and corporations.

With modern technology, it has become feasible to conduct round-the-clock surveillance of far greater numbers of people on a more massive scale — and with far less human effort — compared to what Orwell described in *1984*.

Rewriting History

In the beginning of Orwell's book, Winston Smith was busy at his job. Tellingly, his position was one of assisting the regime to constantly rewrite history. Orwell's warning has proven prophetic. In the modern era, Holocaust deniers have attempted to rewrite history; the FBI and CIA smeared political movements with falsely manufactured "evidence" and concealed their own covert actions; and Stalin's regime rewrote history on a massive scale during the Cold War.

Technology has become increasingly efficient at placing countless people under surveillance and controlling the public. Consumers are enthusiastic participants in this process, voluntarily posting all of their personal information, photos, thoughts and gossip on social media websites. Surveillance cameras are present more often than not, and it is valid to assume they are present in a great number of public and not-so-public places.

The good that might come of this ever-present scrutiny is that crimes are recorded, including those in which police officers abuse their positions of power. For example, on April 4, 2015, a video taken by a bystander was a crucial element that led to a white South Carolina police officer being charged with homicide for shooting and killing Walter Scott, an African American man, after a routine traffic stop. This bit of progress toward equal protection under the law would never have been possible without a video recording by the bystander that showed the unarmed man being shot in the back.

Pressure from citizens is beginning to play a pivotal role in getting us to the point where these injustices will no longer go unanswered. However, someone pointed out to me that there are many times when officer-involved crimes have been recorded in which, nonetheless, nothing happens to the officer.

It can be disconcerting to wonder when and where we are being watched. GPS devices are apparently built into nearly all of our cell phones. Furthermore, electronic technology is so far advanced that one's dwelling could be wiretapped in such a way that a listening device is not findable.

Limitless Ways to Spy

It could easily be carried out with the microphone built into your cell phone, the microphone in your computer, or with a micro-miniature device built into any wall, piece of furniture, appliance or vehicle. You can be monitored with a device mounted atop a power pole across the street. There are limitless opportunities.

In the past, the assumption that you are being watched might get you categorized as having paranoid delusions. However, given the state of technology today, it could be a reasonable assumption.

Yet, even though we know that it might be easy to spy on us, we should avoid falling prey to excessive fear or paranoia. It is important not to leap to any conclusions about surveillance, in the absence of any direct evidence of this.

On the other hand, if Orwell's chilling prediction of omnipresent governmental surveillance has already come true, most of us might never be aware of that. The culture of surveillance and control is creeping upward in subtle steps, and most of us are blithely unaware of the change. And, in fact, we are often willing participants.

The atmosphere in today's society is not exactly the same as in his book. Orwell didn't predict the role of corporate structures being responsible for a good portion of the brainwashing and surveillance that takes place.

The "war on terror" has furnished our government with a great excuse for violating basic civil rights. In the name of keeping Americans safe, we are losing the essence of what America was supposedly about. The fact that I have the freedom to say all of this doesn't make it not so. The public has become numb and jaded to the fact that we are constantly being watched.

Broken by the Government

The punishment for deviating from what was considered normal in Orwell's book included being tortured, imprisoned or disappeared. There was not a single space remaining in this totalitarian society for any sort of freedom, dissent or non-conformity.

In *1984*, the surveillance apparatus detects Winston Smith's small attempts at freedom. He is arrested, thoroughly processed by the government and broken down. He is forced to inform on the person he loves and betray his deeply held values.

Orwell's book was a work of fiction. Yet, in the years since he wrote *1984*, this same fate has happened in real life to countless dissenters and political prisoners.

In the version of Orwell's surveillance society which has materialized in the United States, punishment for dissent is often economic. Or it may involve being excluded, or the loss of employment, or being intimidated by the government. It could mean becoming a political prisoner under the definition of Amnesty International. Or it could seem like a baffling amount of inexplicable bad luck.

While the particulars aren't the same as in *1984*, we are headed towards a society controlled by fear, and where our freedom is undermined by constant surveillance.

Worse Comes to Worse

by George Wynn

Every day
an old man
hungry and sick
with sleeping bag
living minute to minute
stumbles
coming from
Ocean Beach

Every day
some young girl
or some young boy
hungry and sick
like a frightened cat
living minute to minute
rest on the ground
and give a
shivering prayer
on a downtown
lonely
street

Our City
by the Bay
is more full
of homelessness
than you
can even
imagine

Gentrification Blues

by George Wynn

She closes the door
of her studio
by Dolores Park
hands the landlady
(who jacked up her rent
damn near double) the key
"If anyone should ask
tell them I won't be back
to Cable Car Land"
and begins her long
wandering inside
America's abandoned
houses